

YOUR RIGHTS UNDER THE LAW

Thanks to 1986 Federal legislation, you now have a special opportunity to help improve chemical safety in your community. Together with others, you can get involved and make a difference. The Emergency Planning and Community Right-to-Know Act (EPCRA), also known as SARA Title III, requires communities across the country to set up local emergency planning committees (LEPCs) that develop plans for responding to chemical emergencies.

You can join your LEPC and assist in preparing for emergencies and managing chemical risks. The law requires thousands of facilities to submit information about the chemicals they use, store, and emit to the environment. Some small businesses are also required to file reports. You can get this information and take action to reduce risks.

Remember - under EPCRA, you are guaranteed the right to chemical information in your area. EPCRA is based on the idea of working partnerships. All parts of the community must join forces under one or more of the provisions:

PLANNING FOR EMERGENCIES - 301-303

EACH LEPC DEVELOPS A PLAN TO PREPARE AND RESPOND TO EMERGENCIES USING INFORMATION REPORTED BY LOCAL FACILITIES.

These plans are to be submitted to the State Emergency Response Commission (SERC) for review. The LEPC must review their plan at least annually, which would include exercising, or testing, the plan to ensure that all components of emergency preparedness are addressed fully.

REPORTING ACCIDENTAL RELEASES - 304

Chemical plants and other facilities covered under the law must notify federal, state, and local authorities if they release certain chemicals in amounts that exceed the limits EPA has set.

These notifications should alert the community and officials of the type and amount of chemical released, the risks involved with the release, response actions that the facility has taken to prevent or reduce the effects of the release, and any long- or short-term adverse health effects that may be associated with the release.

STORING CHEMICALS - 311 & 312

Facilities must provide information on where and how they store chemicals and in what quantities. They submit this information to the fire department, the LEPC, and the SERC each year by March 1. This information is available to the public through your LEPC or SERC.

REPORTING ANNUAL RELEASES - 313

Each year, manufacturing and other facilities that release certain chemicals into the environment must estimate and report the total amount released, both accidentally and routinely. EPA is making this information available to the public via a national computerized data base called the Toxics Release Inventory, or TRI.

YOU HAVE A RIGHT TO KNOW

Just because you don't live in a town with a big chemical plant doesn't mean you don't have to be concerned about chemical risks. Chemical hazards can exist where you least suspect. Do you realize that gas stations, warehouses, exterminators, garden centers, local dry cleaners, and even local swimming pools also use and store chemicals on their premises - and that these chemicals could pose risks to your community?

Hazards come big and small. Effects can be felt in a split second when an explosion occurs or over a longer time when chemicals may cause public health problems. You can do something about hazards. Information is available. You don't have to be an expert to understand it. You can help lower chemical hazards by encouraging facilities to reduce their chemical inventories and emissions. You can join others that may already be working on the problem.

ACTION CHECKLIST

It's easy to start getting involved. Here are a few ideas for steps you can take right now:

- Call your library for information.
- Contact your LEPC. If you cannot locate one in your area, contact your Office of Emergency Management, your city or county government, or your local fire department.
- Contact your EPA regional office.
- Spread the word - give this brochure to a friend, neighbor, or parent. There are ways in which you can become involved in obtaining and using EPCRA information to enhance the quality of life in your community.
- Make sure that your LEPC has been formed, attend meetings, and make sure it is representative of the community. Volunteer to serve on it as a citizen representative.
- Make sure that the LEPC has obtained all of the information it needs from facilities to prepare a comprehensive response plan.
- Review and comment on the emergency response plan, and ask questions about how procedures set out in the plan affect you, your family, children's school, or place of business.
- Ask for information from your LEPC or SERC about chemical hazards, inventories, and releases in your community. Make sure both the LEPC and SERC have established procedures to make the information readily available to the public. Ask your LEPC what facilities are doing to reduce chemical hazards.
- Use the National TRI data base to obtain information on routine releases of chemicals in your community. Your LEPC should have this information. If not, you or your LEPC can get the TRI information from a local library, your State, or your EPA Regional office.
- Call or visit facilities and ask if they have complied with the reporting requirements.

EPCRA creates a groundbreaking opportunity for you to become directly involved in the decisions that affect your safety and health. Your knowledge of and participation in this program can help ensure that it accomplishes its goals in your community.

LET'S DEAL WITH POTENTIAL HAZARDS BEFORE THEY BECOME A PROBLEM. YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE.